

FIREFIGHTER SCHOOL



by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung
photo by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung
and Staff Sgt. Tavio M. Soto

It's burning, it's burning. The flames swell as the firefighters move into the mouth of the "dragon." In front of them — a 500 degree wall of propane flames. The giant can's steel walls force the jets of fire to sweep over their heads and land behind them.

At the nozzle is Airman 1st Class Jacob Gardner (right); Petty Officer Second Class Jacob Gardner is his backup. Both are doing their best not to be the first students broiled while attending the Department of Defense Louis F. Garland Fire Training Academy at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas.

At their side is Staff Sgt. Timothy Hagen, airport firefighter instructor. He knows this evaluation instills confidence in the use of their silver "bunker" suits and the techniques of fighting an aircraft passenger seat fire. Petty Officer Gardner thinks of the training a little differently. The flames lash out around him. Being the backup guy is no walk in the park.

Now in their final week of the Apprentice Firefighting Course, Airman Kyser, from Erie, N.D., said, "Now that I'm trained I want to return to my hometown and help out the volunteer fire department, begin resident studies at North Dakota State University and join my unit, the 119th Fighter Wing of the North Dakota Air National Guard."

This is a far cry from the self-described quiet

guy who attended Northern Cass High, a school that requires six counties of children to fill its classrooms.

Airman Kyser, now the firefighter, sees dangers in the smoke, flames and everyday settings that people would never think of. His mind is now trained for the technical and dynamic side of both crash and structural firefighting.

Back in the steel dragon's mouth, Airman Kyser applies his new knowledge and uses a circle pattern as he shoots down 200 gallons of water per minute onto the roaring flames. At 200 pounds per square inch, the hose has a constant 60-pound push-back against him.

"I've waited so long, after months of training, the adrenaline is pumping — it's great," he said. "They trained me so well ... I feel really confident. This is what I came here to do."

His muscles strain against the nozzle that wants to be released from his grasp, but adrenaline has kicked in and he maintains control over the powerful water flow.

Soon, the flames begin to retreat. And the showering water of safety that kept the steel mock-up from overcooking these two can now be heard splashing against the outside. With the determined look of victory gleaming in their eyes, the two firefighters step out victorious, receiving the congratulations of classmates. Now it's their turn. 🦁



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